

Book review

Urinary tract infection in clinical and laboratory practice. By Rosalind Maskell (and Michael J Balsdon). (Pp 268; price not given.) London: Edward Arnold, 1988.

This book is intended for general and hospital practitioners and contains much useful advice. It somehow manages to bridge the gap between the disciplines of general and hospital practice as well as between clinical and laboratory workers without being incomprehensible to one group or too basic for another. The final chapter written by Dr Balsdon on "Urinary and lower genital tract infection in genitourinary medicine" will be of particular interest to venereologists. By giving an overview of the clinical aspects of urinary tract infection this book will also give the laboratory worker, whether medically qualified or not, a good insight into some of the problems of patient management.

In her introduction Dr Maskell points out how varied may be the investigations and treatment carried out on patients with suspected or proven urinary tract infection, depending on whether they are referred to a urological surgeon, gynaecologist, venereologist, nephrologist, or a non-specialist doctor or surgeon. She pleads for closer co-operation between the clinician and the laboratory, particularly in the collection of suitable specimens and in the understanding that an absence of demonstrable pathogens in a urine sample, for example, does not necessarily exclude the possibility of an infectious aetiology for the patient's complaints. She asks for a better understanding of the pathogenesis of urinary tract infections and better antimicrobial prescribing based on a clearer perception of the aetiology of the illness and the consequences of improper management in the different patient groups such as children, pregnant women, and patients with obstructive uropathy.

The consequences of improved clinical and laboratory co-operation and better management of patients also helps the laboratory worker to be more interested in and to understand better the relevance of otherwise routine and even boring procedures, such as urine microscopy. All these will ultimately be of benefit to the patient. In her book Dr Maskell largely succeeds in explaining these problems to the different health care groups involved in urinary tract infection and goes a long way towards achieving these desired goals. Inevitably there has to be repetition and overlap, but this is not tedious.

The first chapter is a masterly summary of the pathogenesis of urinary tract infection backed up with good up to date references for those who wish to read further. The next two chapters deal with the important topics of specimen collection, laboratory procedures, and antimicrobial chemotherapy. Didactic advice is given about which antibacterial drug to use, for how long, and also the indications for long term treatment. A carefully chosen short list of drugs is offered. It is interesting to note the emphasis on oral, rather than parenteral treatment, even in acutely ill patients. Many clinicians would have put greater stress here on culturing the blood as well as the urine—for example, from patients with acute pyelonephritis—and administering (at least initially) parenteral antibiotics to potentially septicæmic patients, whether by general practitioners or not.

The chapter on managing urinary tract infection in general practice covers among many other topics the different age groups encountered, the problems with infected male patients, pregnant women, pyrexia of unknown origin, and managing neuropathic bladders. The consequences of substandard management of paediatric and pregnant patients are spelt out in the next two chapters. Other useful and practical contributions deal with urinary tract infection in the context of urological surgery and nephrology, in the elderly, and in other branches of hospital medicine and surgery.

The first item in the Appendix is a clear and very useful table detailing the indications and potential dangers of imaging the urinary tract. Then follows a laboratory protocol—more interesting to clinicians, paradoxically perhaps, than to microbiologists—and, finally, a brief description of the management of a hospital urinary tract infection clinic that would be of help to anyone thinking of setting up a service on a limited budget.

This book is clearly printed on good quality paper and the style also makes for easy reading. The use of black dots in the left hand margin indicates the points that the author wants to emphasise and, although they may be irritating to some, I found them a valuable aid to concentration. Tables are clear and figures, including x rays, are generally well reproduced.

For those wanting an introduction to the subject of urinary tract infection in any of its aspects, this book is to be recommended. It would be a valuable addition to the library of a health centre, particularly for the education of general practice trainees. There are also many in hospital practice who would

benefit from reading it. It would be entirely appropriate on the bookshelves of the library of a genitourinary clinic.

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